DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 300 832 CS 211 593

AUTHOR Popkin, Susan M.
TITLE Graduate Students Writing in Education: Education 310: Professional Communication for Students in Education.
PUB DATE 88
NOTE 24p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Course Descriptions; *Graduate Students; Graduate Study; Higher Education; *Writing Instruction; *Writing Processes
IDENTIFIERS Writing Contexts; Writing Workshops

ABSTRACT

This report describes "Education 310," a course for the general graduate student population taught through Writing Programs for the Graduate School of Education at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA). The report describes the contexts and needs that prompted the course; reviews the influences and resources that suggested the course's design; explains the instructor's goals for the course; discusses the students' writing and revising strategies and the composing processes their texts underwent; recommends further enhancement of Education 310; and underscores the necessity for graduate student and professional writing courses based on this model. (Fifteen references are appended.) (MS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED300832

CS

Dr. Susan M. Popkin
UCLA Writing Programs

Graduate Students Writing in Education

[Education 310: Professional Communication for Students in Education]

Dr. Susan M. Popkin
Pomona College
Writing Committee
Millikan 127
Claremont, CA 91711

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Susan Popkin

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

CS211593

Introductory Comments

The following report describes Education 310, a new course taught Winter quarter, 1987 through Writing Programs for the Graduate School of Education. This report aims at describing the contexts and needs that prompted the course; reviewing the influences and resources that suggested the course's design; explaining the instructor's goals for the course; discussing the students' writing and revising strategies and the composing processes their texts underwent; recommending further enhancement of Education 310; and underscoring the necessity for graduate student and professional writing courses based on this model.

This report ideally will encourage the development of other "310s" and courses like it as cooperative ventures between Writing Programs and the university's professional and graduate schools.

Contexts and Needs for Education 310

I created this writing course for School of Education graduate students and dissertants because I viewed Education, and its related fields, as synonomous with "humanism." I perceived that the scholarship and research, the degrees and programs, in a School of Education as "Janus-like": they looked closely at the history of Education and the application of research and theory; they looked cautiously at the future of school policies and proposals. I believed the educator considered the people working and studying in grades K-12, and

in the universities, in his studies; that he explored the possibilities and potentials of individuals and groups populating the colleges and schools, in his projections. And, among the statistics, tables, data collections, and print-outs, I believed there was a concentrated interest in education--in learning, schooling, teaching, in the discourses of the field. I believed all this despite the impersonal jargon, impenetrable terminologies, and empty prose which consumed the voices of education researchers, students, and future teachers. Education 310: Professional Communication for Students in Education--itself a title full of nominalizations--was created to address the writing processes and products of graduate students in Education. And when one warm, personable, perceptive student, studying values and tasks in young learners, referred to parents and teachers as "external regulators," I knew I had proposed the right course for the right discipline.

The Graduate-Student Writer

Education 310 addresses a concern many graduate programs and professional schools have discovered: poor writing and communication skills in students earning advanced degrees and credentials. Writing instruction for graduate students is not an issue in remediation, or in the teaching of basic skills; it focuses on communication in a particular profession and discipline, upon familiarity with the conventions of particular modes of discourse, upon the study of very specific voices and audiences for graduate student-generated texts.

The graduate population at a major university is not a homogeneous population in terms of composing strategies: graduate students may not have received undergraduate training at their present universities, or even at an American university or college. Many students have been out of the university environment for years; some have worked in professions and careers quite different from the courses of study they now pursue. Their ideas about composing strategies, research methods, and revision processes are not equal, and may not be current. They may assume that writing for undergraduate courses is "the same as" writing for graduate courses--only longer and more stressful! If a student's undergraduate education did not require extended writing assignments, or research papers and library strategies, then as a graduate degree candidate that student is even more of an alien to writing in his new discipline. Moreover, the writing skills and proficiencies of graduate students who are teaching assistants and readers for professors and departments affect writing--and thinking--skills in undergraduate courses, in credential programs, and in the schools, as well.

To address these variables in graduate education and preparation, Education 310--one in a series of writing workshops for the professional and graduate schools--offers graduate students working on dissertation proposals, preproposals, papers, or articles, a workshop for their writing, for their ideas. The student works on a single project of his

own, focusing on his own needs and goals: academic and personal stylistics, sense of audience for a particular written project, revision strategies as distinguished from editing skills, and documentation style and conventions. The student leads a discussion on his project, his text, and the feedback from instructor and classmates is oral, aural, and written. For some students, this is the first opportunity they have to discuss their texts with interested parties; for others, the workshop is an opportunity for "final" feedback before the text is in the mail to a journal or presented to The Committee for approval. While the course does not substitute for research and bibliography classes in the discipline, for methodology courses, or for the academic/dissertation advisors, it does provide responsible feedback and specialized input from a professional/academic writing instructor and guided responses from workshop members in related fields. This feedback is tailored to each student's writing needs, to the contexts for each project, and to the anticipated audiences for the final draft.

Influences on the Design of Education 310

Research in the Field

My design for the writing workshop was influenced by Peter Elbow's Writing without Teachers (1973) and Writing with Power (1981), and by Robert Slavin's "Learning Together" (1986). Mike Rose's examination of writer's block (1984 and 1985)

helped articulate further problems dissertants might encounter in their written graduate work; Richard Lanham's studies in stylistics, Revising Prose (1979 and 1987) and Style: An Anti-textbook (1978), helped define and shape the discourse and terminologies shared in the workshop sessions. Joseph Williams' book on style, sense, and the shape of prose (Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace, 1985), coupled with John Trimble's Writing with Style (1975), spoke to the needs of each text produced for, and introduced into, the class meetings.

My own experience with undergraduate--upper and lower division--composition courses helped determine the pace and shape of the class, particularly the collaborative learning design. My years of instructing teacher-training courses for credential candidates provided the background in Education theory and the technical language I needed to address a reading of, and response to, the students' texts. Moreover, UCLA had a history of successful models for graduate writing workshops. The Graduate Council and the Graduate School of Education welcomed the course and supported and approved its creation. I had a personal, working relationship with administration and alumni groups in GSE, and a keen interest and enjoyment in working with "adult" writers, researchers, and scholars in Education. So, with this instructor's background established, the course's credibility was "unquestioned."

The class was, then, a forum: a resource of participation and involvement, rooted in fellowship and cooperation, designed

with professionalism and experience. The students' responsibilities were communal and, finally, individual.

The Instructor's Goals for Education 310

While the focused discipline, Education, was shared by members of the workshop, each was engaged in a different field of concern or specialization: higher education, educational psychology, curriculum, APSE/ACE. Each student had something to learn from the texts of the members--a good enough reason for the workshop itself! Because the class was designed as Pass/No Pass, competition was eliminated, and collaboration was substituted as the imperative for the workshops. One paper, each week, was discussed for most of the two-hour session, and a stylistic, documentation, language, or composing strategy was addressed as well. Students were provided with a text, a week ahead of class discussion, and they were expected to discuss the work aloud, and to provide written comments and recommendations for revision to the writer. A reading syllabus was followed, with materials generated from handouts on collaborative learning, with materials on voice, and readings from the Williams and Trimble books. I spoke less each class, allowing the writer to lead his discussion and the readers to address the sense, style, and intentions of the text. They became efficient editors, or "committee," and proficient readers of prose.

Style Analyses

I have since read H. R. Struck's description of a graduate writing course he designed ("Wanted: More Writing Courses for Graduate Students," 1976) and believe his numerical analysis of sentence lengths and stylistic variations to be of limited usefulness in a workshop examining the communication of ideas of consequence. While we can provide such an analysis based on Richard Lanham's "paramedic method," Struck's "counts" eliminate the very important concerns of the workshop's discussions: the "eternal" connection between style and sense, the meaning of the text to the writer, and his important (faculty) audience. Struck's mechanical statistical output, as described in his article, eliminates the "voice" in the text--the very humanism my course sought to revive in Education/academic prose.

Each student's text generates meaning, or meanings, not just percentages of clauses or numbers of nouns. While a stylistic/statistical analysis may describe the nature of Education discourse, even prescribe a methodology for producing it (hence, a segue into the community), it will not help graduate students determine when to employ explanatory footnotes for definitions and clarifications; it will not help connect or organize sections of texts when headings fail to make meanings; it will not indicate when an example, or an anecdote from a case study, is required to emphasize the important thesis of the graduate student-writer; it will not help determine the overuse of tables or the omission of words

when figures intrude into the prose. Struck's methodology and pedagogy may indicate passivity, dependent clauses, word repetition; it will not indicate the need for logical reorganization or for clarification--even elimination--of terminologies. I guess what I am trying to say is that we cannot just imitate style to make meaning; we cannot address composing as just another "science" to be computed through statistics. We need ideas of consequence to communicate, and opportunities, combinations, and syntactical structures to select from, in order to shape and approximate those same ideas. While each student was able to "write in the discipline" in my workshop, meanings in their texts were not always clear. What Struck's method seems to overlook is that each text has particular stylistic needs, and that each writer has specific goals. While analytical counts might indicate stylistic weaknesses, they will not provide strategies for revising, as a workshop will. Statistical counts retrieve "words"; writing workshops apprehend "ideas."

Workshop Activities

Each writer prepared an abstract or summary of the project she was preparing for the class. This information, distributed by the second class meeting, introduced the class members to the kinds of reading and ranges of writing they would be exposed to. In addition, the course syllabus anticipated some concerns the prose would generate: active voice and precise nouns, euphemisms and unclear contexts for information (Lanham); recommended steps in the writing process itself, and issues

involving writer's block (Rose); sprawl, diction, and readability (Williams); audience and department concerns and requirements; conventions, including use of headings, graphs, statistics, and tables. So, while the students' texts were the core of the course, instructions for reading prose and for responding to texts-in-process were designed into the class meetings. As luck would have it, the discussions generated by the students' texts often coincided with the weekly syllabus!

Milton's prose, for example, needed reorganization and revision for emphasis; his voice, thoughts, and discoveries were embedded in the extensive--and nicely explained--research on policies in higher education. Jane's text was weighted by a plethora of tables; her prose needed revision for preciseness, for parallelism, for deletion of repeated information (in prose and in tables). Clarissa's text provided us with a session on punctuation: commas, semicolons, and colons. Her project needed sentence-level editing and a critical premise for the study. New to the graduate program, Clarissa also needed to adapt an appropriate documentation style to her writing. Sophia's text, like a few others, was replete with generalizations and meta-discourse--in its first draft. The workshop members considered her text as overflowing--overpowered--with jargon. And since her study was in educational psychology, particularly studying young children (the happy marriage of education/science and humanism), we felt contact with her "subjects" would help control the technical language.

These projects were drafts of intended texts; they were not final products. I've since thought of renaming the course "Pre-Proposal, Post-Proposal, and Meno-Proposal Writing" because even the revised versions were not quite ready for reading by an advisor. The students who prepared the texts, and the workshop members who read each one, understood the works were in process, and the value of these "open" texts was appreciated for themselves and for the prose they might become.

Don't think the class meetings were hand-holding sessions; they demanded careful, judicious reading and commentary. To this end, attendance was counted and was taken--despite the level of the course. When one member considered the ideas in a text "good," and offered, in her words, a few "nitpicky" concerns about word choice, sentence structure, and punctuation, we (well, really, I) initiated a discussion about the relationships between style and sense, the concepts of the "split" grade, and the philosophies of written communication. For the most part, we confirmed a writer's suspicions about his text's communicativeness, and we offered suggestions for revisions--from the word-choice level to more global concerns.

Students were introduced, many for the first time, to the advantage of freewriting. Some were unsure about how to title tables in their texts or how to discuss these tables without redundancy. Others were concerned about the length of the proposal, while a few other members were interested in attempting to include materials in explanatory notes. Some needed

refresher courses in active verbs, in parallelism for controlling long sentences. We studied sentences including statistical information to discover problems in that kind of prose and concluded it was best to complete the English sentence first, and to then interject the numerical figures when writing. In other projects we questioned the actual management of the proposal topic, the kinds of methodologies the students proposed to undertake, the vagueness or general nature of statements in the proposals, and even the "so what?" nature of blossoming ideas.

Composing and Revising Strategies of Graduate-Student Writers

Focus and Metadiscourse

One paper, examining a historical feature of university education, offered us a number of opportunities for studying the complex and periodic sentences, and for examining the uses of grammar in such constructions. In one workshop session we were able to identify confusing quotations, misplaced analyses, and summaries of summaries. We were able to determine why these features of the prose occurred, and what useful information they were telling us about the student's writing process, and even about the future of the final product. Often the student was testing the arrangement of thesis and assertions; sometimes the student was wrestling with statistics and numerical representations of language; occasionally the student was, herself, confused about the "purpose" of the paper, i.e.,

the text was not developing a "critical history" of education but was telling a chronology of the university system. The paper, in sum, needed a focus on an issue.

This same piece was replete with what Joseph Williams (1985) calls "metadiscourse": set-ups, fillers, information about the writing. An example:

> Having examined the historic developmental differences of certain forms of women's colleges and the vitality of those extant, it is now appropriate to look at data which provides further information regarding the variety that exists within the women's college sector.

Concerned that the passage was a combination of metadiscourse, jargon, and redundancy, we encouraged the student to revise for preciseness and directness:

> Women's colleges continue to exist in particular forms and varieties. This history shall examine the existence of these colleges.

The student refocused the prose on women's colleges and away from the "data," deleted the suggestion that the study was, indeed, "inappropriate," and edited some jargon and filler.

Voice

Another student, educated in the workshop in the overuse of technical language and impersonal constructions on a topic of a "humanistic" nature, revised her prose from:

> . . . by this age children have internalized the external regulators' reasons for participating in nonspontaneous activities, and no longer need the approval or disapproval from the social environment to motivate their behavior . . .

to:

> By this age, children have internalized parents' and teachers' reasons for participating in social, academic, and physical activities; they no longer must have the approval or disapproval from the social environment to motivate their behavior.

The changes in diction and in syntactical structure provided a new focus and emphasis: they indicated changes occurring in the children (the important actors in this text).

This same student needed some sentence revision skills using parallelism:

> . . . students will be asked open-ended questions regarding the academic, social, and physical domains--such as math, social studies, arts, sports, and making new friends. . . . .

The writer needed to revise for best clarification of the "domains"--to match examples with the specific areas of behavior and learning.

Another student's text revealed reasons for all of this

sprawl and overuse of technical language: an unwitting revelation, indeed. Quoting from a source in his work, the student wrote that

> . . . the effectiveness and contribution of human service practitioners will be enhanced through tools derivable through an orderly and testable process from existing social science knowledge.

In attempting to be scientific, to be approved (as Richard Lanham describes in his Revising Prose videotape), modern social science, of which Education is a primary field, has foresaken the concise and the clear for the seemingly scientific and apparently authoritative. The quoted statement is an "objective correlative" of the student's paper: it is a text addressing the struggle of human affairs practitioners (student services administrators) for acceptance in academic circles; it is a struggle, as well, for a critical voice in the writer among the research, studies, and statistics cited in his paper. The topic is humanistic; the style is scientific. The workshop struggled with the prose to find a happy blend of two seemingly disparate rhetorics.

Sentence Shape

A number of passages in the students' prose demonstrated the abandonment of the syntactically mature sentence for the numbers, percentages, and statistics of the sciences:

> While the majority of mathematics teachers has a 20-33% percent of their total college course work in mathematics, 14.1% percent had as little as 1-19% percent of their total college credits in mathematics and 9.3% percent of the sample had 34-39% of their total hours in mathematics.

The workshop recommended that the student compose the English sentence first, being clear on the precise nouns and the related modifiers, and then add the figures for emphasis and detail.

Redundancy

Redundancy was a recurring problem and a revealing element about the processes and imperatives of each paper. Students began to understand how "telling" repeated statements or passages were, how the placement, or appearance, of repeated materials indicated directions for development or the all-important detailing of the critical thesis. Redundancies often revealed what each student had, indeed, synthesized from his research and readings, and how the writer was planning the shape of his text. Redundancy occurred on two levels: sentence-level repetitions and whole passage restatements. For example:

> This information, however, is of limited use since such factors are beyond the control of policymakers in public education. While a given student's family background may be very influential in terms of his or her educational

> achievement, essentially it is beyond the scope of public policymakers [sic] influence.

Once the redundant ideas are pointed out to the writer, he can select the clearer, fuller statement; he can decide if restatement is needed for emphasis and clarity; he can develop a sensitivity for detecting redundancies and the awareness of what they indicate about the focus and developing thesis in his prose.

Grammar and Usage

Students needed, on individual bases and in class discussions, a review of basic grammar. What they needed to recognize was that punctuation was not a matter of breathing, but a matter of logic and design in the making of meaning:

> The SREB's analysis of between field subject related course work reports the following. The range of average hours taken in subject-related course work was from 33.5 hours, for mathematics, to 57.9 hours, for fine arts teachers.

This student needed to rethink the groupings, or chunks of information in these ideas, and to punctuate according to the logic of her meaning, not according to the emptiness of rules. This text also needed to address strings of nouns and adjective-nouns combinations.

Technical Language

The problem of technical language was not an easy issue to address. The workshop never adopted the attitude of deleting or destroying the use of technical language; a goal of the class sessions, and of the students' projects, was to assume the voices of the disciplines--but not at the expense of the writer's own critical voice. And while we spent many hours adjusting to new vocabularies, and recommending stylistic variations in order to convey the best intended meanings, the workshop members acquiesced to each writer's decisions as to when prose needed revision and when the terminologies were absolutely necessary. Basically, we wanted each writer to understand his own use of the terms, to be certain they were used appropriately, to be sure they were used to his own best rhetorical advantage. Beyond our educated confusion and questioning, the student-writer considered our comments and concerns, and then took final judgment upon himself with his advisor. We were not always entirely satisfied with the writer's decisions but we were respectful of them.

Finally, the students needed to recognize that the dissertation process was a creative act, not merely a mechanical arrangement of words, statistics, tables, and sources. They needed to recognize, in their own works, through analysis of their own dissertation writing processes, that selection and manipulation, emphasis and focus, were as much an element of choice as was pursuit of the degree in the first place! And

while there were guidelines to follow and fields of rhetoric to apprehend, their sources were their "collaborators," their studies were their "peers." They had to reenvision the proposal and the ensuing project as a workshop of ideas and information speaking to them, and they had to see themselves as the instructors in that process.

Recommendations for Enhancing Education 310

I've been considering changes I'd make in the next offering of the workshop and, in all honesty, I see few at this time. I might have the students run their texts through our Revising Prose stylistic analysis: the information may appeal to their scientific natures; it might verify suspicions about their prose. The analysis offers material applicable to the class readings, and the workshop can provide follow-up discussions of style and revision strategies. The students might enjoy analyzing, in a more scientific way, the rhetoric of their discipline--not merely to copy, but to adapt and even improve.

I've also become recently informed about the methodology course which helps plan the students' research studies and strategies. The course seems to be a possible companion to this workshop because it helps the student define his research question and to focus the dissertation so that he can, indeed, conduct a related study. The strategies for devising the dissertation questions, as described to me, seem useful and clever--from cut-and-paste methods to brainstorming and

free-writing. I might approach GSE to plan a two-hour combined workshop in order to address a larger number of graduate students on these related matters (a GSAE colloquia).

In short, I see the continuing need for the workshop, and I am beginning to perceive avenues for broadening the study of improved composing in Education.

The Necessity for Graduate-Student and Professional Writing Courses, Based on Education 310

A few weeks after the workshop ended, one student-writer called to discuss the further progress she was making on her proposal. It seemed the "review of literature" was not going anywhere; it appeared to be a "he says/she says" chapter. Dipping into the kinds of writing we do in literary studies, I realized that I could, indeed, help with this problem. Our discipline--itself a real problem in absorbing, apprehending, and articulating technical language--establishes critical voice by "contending with" or addressing the existing research in the field. What the student needed to do, in like manner, was find the critical issue, the single departure she was making from the research, and reshape the chapter accordingly. The section needed to be more than a chronology or a summary of what had gone before; it had to have a basic argument so that her perspective was clarified and focused and her materials logically organized.

I mention this incident because, in sum, the kinds of reading, critical analyses, and synthesizing we have engaged in

in literary studies and in composition theory, research, and teaching, seems to be the basis for expanding into cross-disciplinary fields. While, as admitted earlier, I feared the technical language of the Education fields, I also realized that if I could comprehend some of our own current critical theory, then I could comprehend just about any prose, in almost any context!

And to further develop the elements of collaborative learning, as well as to reveal the processes and problems professional/academic writers experience, I distributed one of my papers in-process to the students at the last class meeting. While they were hampered by a lack of familiarity with the texts I was examining, they were concerned about some sentence styles, about the usage of particular words, and they were informing about the passive voice in the draft they read. We analyzed these patterns to discover what they revealed about the writer's process, about the intended audience, and about the nature of the discipline.

I took the criticism well. I think.

References

Astin, Alexander W. 1986. Four Critical Years. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc.

Bloom, Lynn Z. 1985. Anxious Writers in Context: Graduate School and Beyond. When a Writer Can't Write, ed. Mike Rose, 110-133. New York: The Guilford Press.

_____. 1981. Why Graduate Students Can't Write: Implications of Research on Writing Anxiety for Graduate Education. Journal of Advanced Composition 2:103-117.

Elbow, Peter. 1987. Closing My Eyes As I Speak: An Argument for Ignoring Audience. College English 49:50-69.

_____. 1973. Writing without Teachers. New York: Oxford University Press.

_____. 1981. Writing with Power: Techniques for Mastering the Writing Process. New York: Oxford University Press.

Gilman, David Alan. 1974. The Dissertation as a Terminal Exercise in Scholarly Activity. Contemporary Education 45:309-312.

Lanham, Richard A. 1987. Revising Prose, 2nd ed. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co.

_____. 1978. Style: An Anti-Textbook. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Rose, Mike, ed. 1985. When a Writer Can't Write: Studies in Writer's Block and Other Composing-Process Problems. New York: The Guilford Press.

_____. 1984. Writer's Block: The Cognitive Dimension. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Slavin, Robert E. 1986. Learning Together. American Educator, Vol. 10, 2:6-13.

Struck, H. R. 1976. Wanted: More Writing Courses for Graduate Students. College Composition and Communication 27:192-197.

Trimble, John R. 1975. Writing with Style: Conversations on the Art of Writing. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Williams, Joseph M. 1985. Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace, 2nd ed. Scott, Foresman and Co.